

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 36

March 14, 1996, 9:13 p.m.
Page S-2083 Temp. Record

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS/Deficit-Reduction Lockbox

SUBJECT: Balanced Budget Downpayment Act, II . . . H.R. 3019. Grams motion to waive the Budget Act for the consideration of the Grams amendment No. 3492 to the Hatfield modified substitute amendment No. 3466.

ACTION: MOTION REJECTED, 36-57

SYNOPSIS: As introduced, H.R. 3019, the Balanced Budget Downpayment Act, II, will make rescissions and will provide appropriations for fiscal year 1996 for the five regular appropriations bills that have not yet been signed into law (three of those bills have been vetoed, one has been stalled by a Senate Democratic filibuster on its conference report, and one has been stalled by a Senate Democratic filibuster against even beginning its consideration).

The Hatfield modified substitute amendment contains the text of S. 1594, as reported, which is the Senate's version of the bill. The amendment would increase spending by \$1.2 billion over the House-passed amount, and would create a \$4.8 billion contingency fund to accommodate part of the additional \$8 billion in spending requested by President Clinton (funds would not be released unless offsets were identified and enacted; President Clinton did not ask for or identify any means of paying for his increased spending proposals). As amended, the contingency fund was reduced due to increased education spending with offsets (see vote No. 27).

The Grams amendment would enact new budget procedures that would result in reductions in the discretionary spending caps equal to any net reductions in spending that are made by amendments to appropriations bills (thereby creating a 60-vote point of order against spending any savings that result from amendments to an appropriations bill instead of using those savings to reduce the deficit). Additionally, the amendment would enact procedures to require that any revenues that are collected that are in excess of the expected amount must either be used to reduce the deficit or returned to the American people by cutting taxes.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Domenici raised the point of order that the amendment violated section 306 of the Budget Act. Senator Grams then moved to waive the Budget Act for the consideration of the amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

NOTE: A three-fifths majority (60) vote is required to waive the Budget Act. Following the failure of the motion to waive, the point of order was upheld and the amendment thus fell.

(See other side)

YEAS (36)			NAYS (57)			NOT VOTING (7)	
Republicans (33 or 67%)	Democrats (3 or 7%)		Republicans (16 or 33%)	Democrats (41 or 93%)		Republicans (4)	Democrats (3)
Abraham	Kempthorne	Baucus	Bond	Akaka	Hollings	Bennett ⁻²	Kennedy ⁻²
Ashcroft	Kyl	Feingold	Burns	Biden	Inouye	Dole ⁻²	Moynihan ⁻¹
Brown	Lott	Kohl	Campbell	Bingaman	Johnston	Kassebaum ⁻²	Pryor ⁻²
Coats	Lugar		Chafee	Boxer	Kerrey	Stevens ⁻²	
Coverdell	Mack		Cochran	Bradley	Kerry		
Craig	McCain		Cohen	Breaux	Lautenberg		
DeWine	Murkowski		D'Amato	Bryan	Leahy		
Faircloth	Nickles		Domenici	Bumpers	Levin		
Frist	Pressler		Gorton	Byrd	Lieberman		
Gramm	Roth		Hatfield	Conrad	Mikulski		
Grams	Santorum		Helms	Daschle	Moseley-Braun		
Grassley	Shelby		Jeffords	Dodd	Murray		
Gregg	Simpson		McConnell	Dorgan	Nunn		
Hatch	Smith		Snowe	Exon	Pell		
Hutchison	Thomas		Specter	Feinstein	Reid		
Inhofe	Thompson		Thurmond	Ford	Robb		
	Warner			Glenn	Rockefeller		
				Graham	Sarbanes		
				Harkin	Simon		
				Heflin	Wellstone		
					Wyden		
						EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:	
						1—Official Business	
						2—Necessarily Absent	
						3—Illness	
						4—Other	
						SYMBOLS:	
						AY—Announced Yea	
						AN—Announced Nay	
						PY—Paired Yea	
						PN—Paired Nay	

Those favoring the amendment contended:

The Grams amendment contains two provisions. The first would correct a current error in our budget process and the second would restrain the growth of the Federal Government. To explain the first provision one must first understand the current budget process. At the beginning of the year, Congress decides how much money it is going to spend that year on entitlements and on appropriated accounts. The Appropriations Committee then divides up the amount for appropriated accounts among its subcommittees for the 13 regular appropriations bills. Sometimes, when a regular appropriations bill is considered, amendments are adopted that reduce its spending below its allocated amount. Most Americans would assume that these are savings, but they are not necessarily. Congress can spend any savings as long as it stays under its original cap. The funds may be allocated to another regular appropriations bill, or they may be spent on a supplemental bill. Given the constant pressure in Congress to spend, spend, spend, the only reasonably sure way to guarantee that savings will be used for deficit reduction is to lower the spending caps (which require supermajority votes to exceed). That course would be followed by the Grams amendment. When an appropriations bill passed, its allocation would be reduced by the amount of savings, if any, it contained, and the total allocation for all appropriations bills would also be cut. The savings would be applied to a deficit-reduction lockbox to lower the deficit.

The second part of the Grams amendment would restrain the growth of the Federal Government. Each year's budget is based on projected receipts and outlays. Historically, when the Government has failed to collect as much in taxes and fees as it has expected to collect, it has not reduced spending--it has borrowed. However, when its revenues have exceeded expectations, it has not used the excess to reduce the deficit or debt, nor has it given the money back to the American people from whom it took it. Instead, it has spent it, and Government has gotten ever bigger. The Grams amendment would stop this spending of excess revenues. It would require the Government either to give the money back or to use it to reduce the deficit. Republicans have long championed cutting the growth of the Federal Government, and many Democrats, including the President, have recently begun giving at least lip-service to the idea. Going by our colleagues' previous statements, both Democrats and Republicans, this provision should have widespread support.

The United States is burdened with a \$5 trillion debt largely because Congress has found it difficult to control its spending. The Grams amendment would give Congress two new tools to help it be more frugal. We urge our colleagues to grasp these tools by voting in favor of the amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

We oppose the Grams amendment with reluctance. Its twin thrusts--to reduce spending and to restrain the growth of the Federal Government--are certainly ones with which we agree. However, we cannot endorse the means that it uses. The budget process is intended to bring reason and discipline to the Government's spending. By looking at the budget all at once, it is possible to set priorities in a manner that is not possible when proceeding in a piecemeal fashion. Since Republicans took over Congress, we believe that the process has been working well, especially with appropriated accounts. This year more than \$21 billion will be saved under the overall cap. We sat down and worked out the overall amount that should be spent, and we are sticking with the amount. Further, this reduction is all the more responsible because our deficit problems are not even from this area of the budget. Appropriated accounts have not grown--discretionary spending has remained stable, and defense spending has fallen precipitously over the last 10 years. The part of the budget that is out of control is entitlement spending. Republicans did not neglect that area--they passed a balanced budget plan that would have worked because, unlike plans that have been adopted by previous Congresses, it restrained entitlement spending instead of relying on budget gimmicks or making false promises to cut future discretionary spending. President Clinton vetoed that plan. We should not now respond by passing a proposal to make further, piecemeal reductions in discretionary spending. Instead, we should redouble our efforts to force President Clinton and other Democrats to join us in restraining the growth of entitlement spending; for the good of the country, we have to get Democrats to stop playing political games and to start negotiating seriously on a compromise solution. The Grams amendment, while well-intentioned, would not improve the budget process, and should therefore be rejected.